A Blue Christmas Service • December 21, 2025 • 4:00pm
178 OENOKE RIDGE, NEW CANAAN, CT 06840 • 203-966-0002 • FPCNC.ORG

Grace and peace to you, and welcome!
As you prepare for worship, please sign the red welcome pad found at the center of each aisle so that we will know you worshipped with us. Then pass it to your neighbor. The last person to sign the pad should pass it back to the center of the aisle. We suggest you prayerfully allow the silent, sacred space of where you are, and the quiet stirrings of the Holy Spirit to prepare your heart and mind for worship.

**PLEASE STAND IN BODY AND/OR SPIRIT.*

THE GATHERING

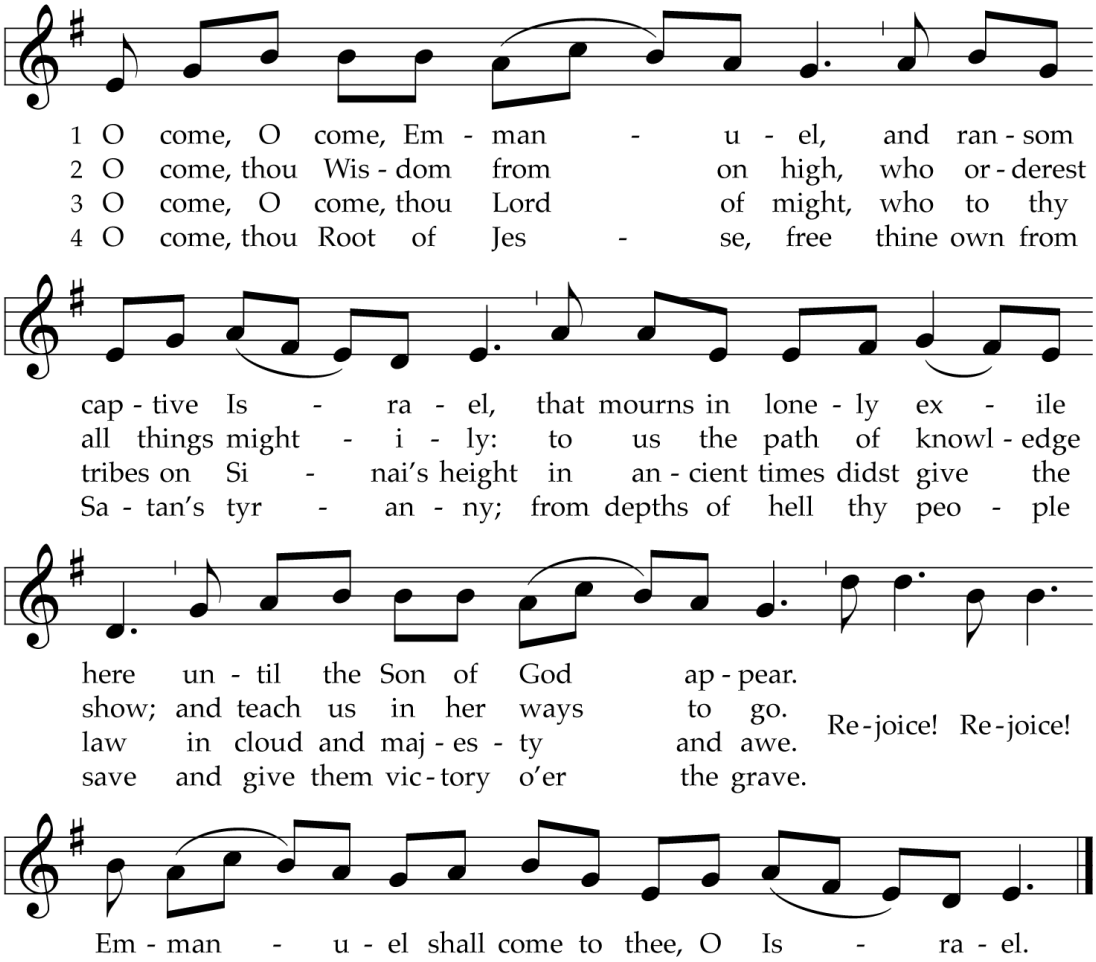
Prelude

Words of Welcome The Rev. Scott Herr

***Call to Worship** The Rev. Mary Marple Thies

Leader: The people who walked in darkness—
All: From the darkness of this night, we have come.
Leader: Those who lived in the land of deep darkness—
All: From the darkness of grief and hardship, illness and worry, we have come.
Leader: The people who walked in darkness, have seen a great light.
All: We come seeking light and life, hope and peace.
Leader: Those who lived in the land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.
All: We come seeking the Light of the World.
Leader: Let us come to worship God who is Light and Life

***Hymn No. 88:** O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (verses 1, 6, 7) *Veni Emmanuel*



5 O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

6 O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

7 O come, Desire of nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
bid envy, strife, and discord cease;
fill the whole world with heaven's peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Prayer of Confession (unison) The Rev. Mary Marple Thies

Lord God, forgive our clouded memory:
In the dark crevices of our despair and discouragement
we forget how you said,
"Let there be light."
In our wilderness wanderings of grief
we forget how you led your people along the way
with a pillar of fire so they would not be lost.

In the lonely corners of our living
we forget that you gave the One who was the light of all people.
Forgive our forgetfulness and fill us with your promise that your light shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot overcome it. Amen.

(pause for silent prayer)

Assurance of Pardon The Rev. Mary Marple Thies

Leader: Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."
All: **In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and given new life.**

CANDLELIGHTING CEREMONY – THE PLACES OF CHRISTMAS

Eden The Rev. Dr. Cheryl Bundy
Reading: Genesis 2:7-9, Genesis 3:22-23, Isaiah 35:10

Leader: This candle is the candle of Eden, the place of paradise and the place of lost promises. In a long ago time, we lived in perfect love so that death had no hold on us, but one day we turned from God to our own devices. Love was shattered and death became a reality to be feared. Tonight, as we light this candle, we remember the place of God's caring and love, even as we acknowledge the truth of how it is with us.
All: **We seek and wait for God's caring and love.**

Reading: *To Know the Dark*

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings,
and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.

by Wendell Berry

Solo: There's Still My Joy

Jeanette Osborn

The Promised Land Chaplain Daniel DeLoma

Reading: Genesis 12:1-2, Isaiah 35:8

Leader: This candle is the candle of the Promised Land. After many years, God chose a family to start the journey to a land of promise. Abraham and Sarah began that journey to a place where God and humanity would again meet, but for them the journey was never completed. Tonight, as we light this candle, we acknowledge our longing for a place where we may once again dwell in peace.
All: **We seek and wait for God's Promised Land.**

Reading: *Later*

Later
after the angels,
after the stable,
after the Child,
they went back. . .
as we always must,
back to the world that doesn't understand
our talk of angels and stars
and especially not the Child

by Ann Weems

Bethlehem The Rev. Martha Epstein

Reading: Micah 5:2, Luke 2:4-7

Leader: This candle is the candle of Bethlehem. Bethlehem was the birthplace of Jesus, a place marked by anger, unrest and the threat of danger. There, without benefit of midwife or the comfort of family, Mary gave birth. There, helpless and unable to provide a comfortable place for his family, Joseph did what he could to help. Tonight, as we light this candle, we acknowledge all places of danger and unrest in our world and in our lives.

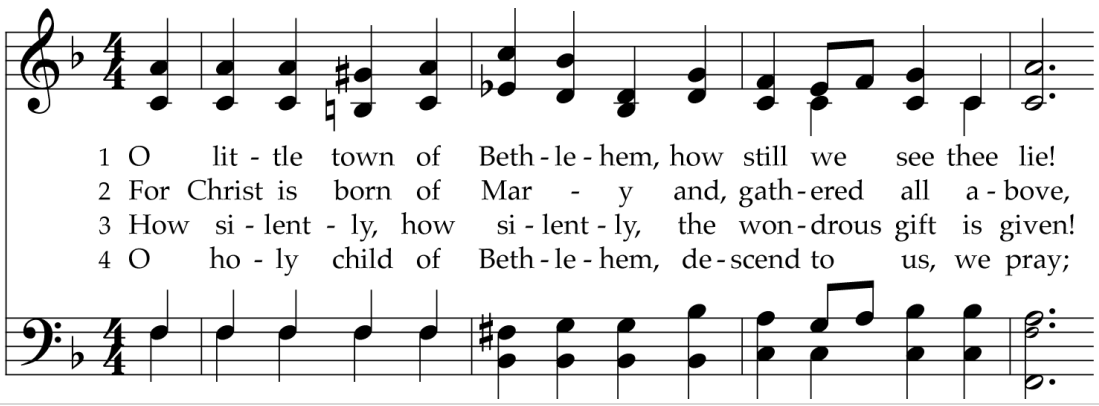
All: We seek and wait for the place where hopes and fears may meet.

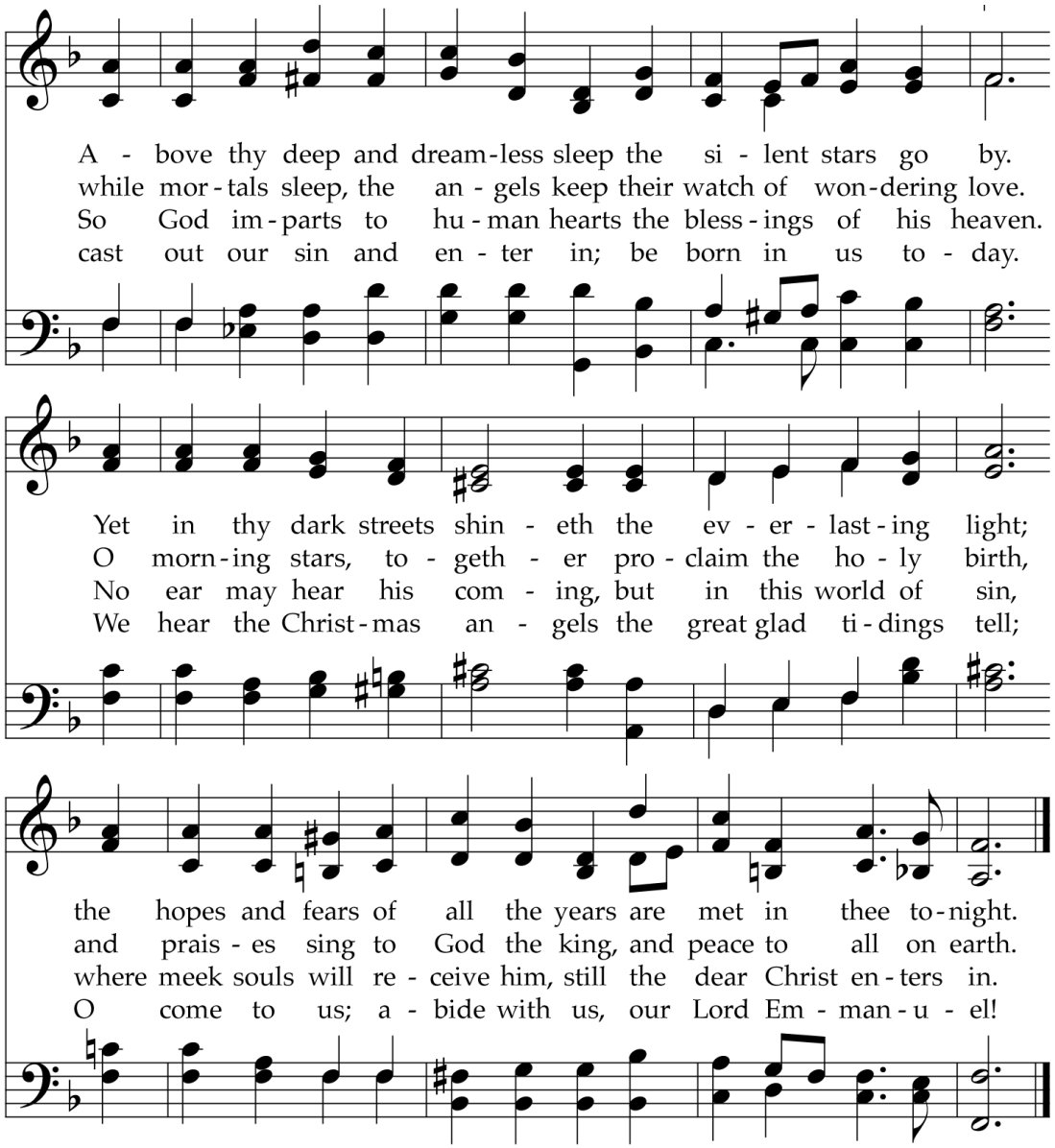
Reading: *Medicine Woman*

For all that enfolds us
for each word of grace
and every act of care;
for those who offer refuge
for each shelter given
and every welcome space;
for the healing of our souls
for balm and rest
for soothing and sleep;
for vigils kept
and for lights kept burning;
blessed be

by Jan Richardson

***Hymn No. 121:** O Little Town of Bethlehem (verses 1, 3, 4) *St. Louis*





New Canaan The Rev. Dr. R Scott Herr

Reading: John 1:14 (*The Message*)

Leader: This candle is the candle of our community, the places where we live. Like our ancestors in the faith, we too are wanderers, even if we have a permanent address, for we too are seeking after God. We too are trying to trust in God's promises. God's promise sealed in Jesus Christ is to make the divine dwelling place in our place. Even here, God is in our midst.

All: We seek and wait for God's love.

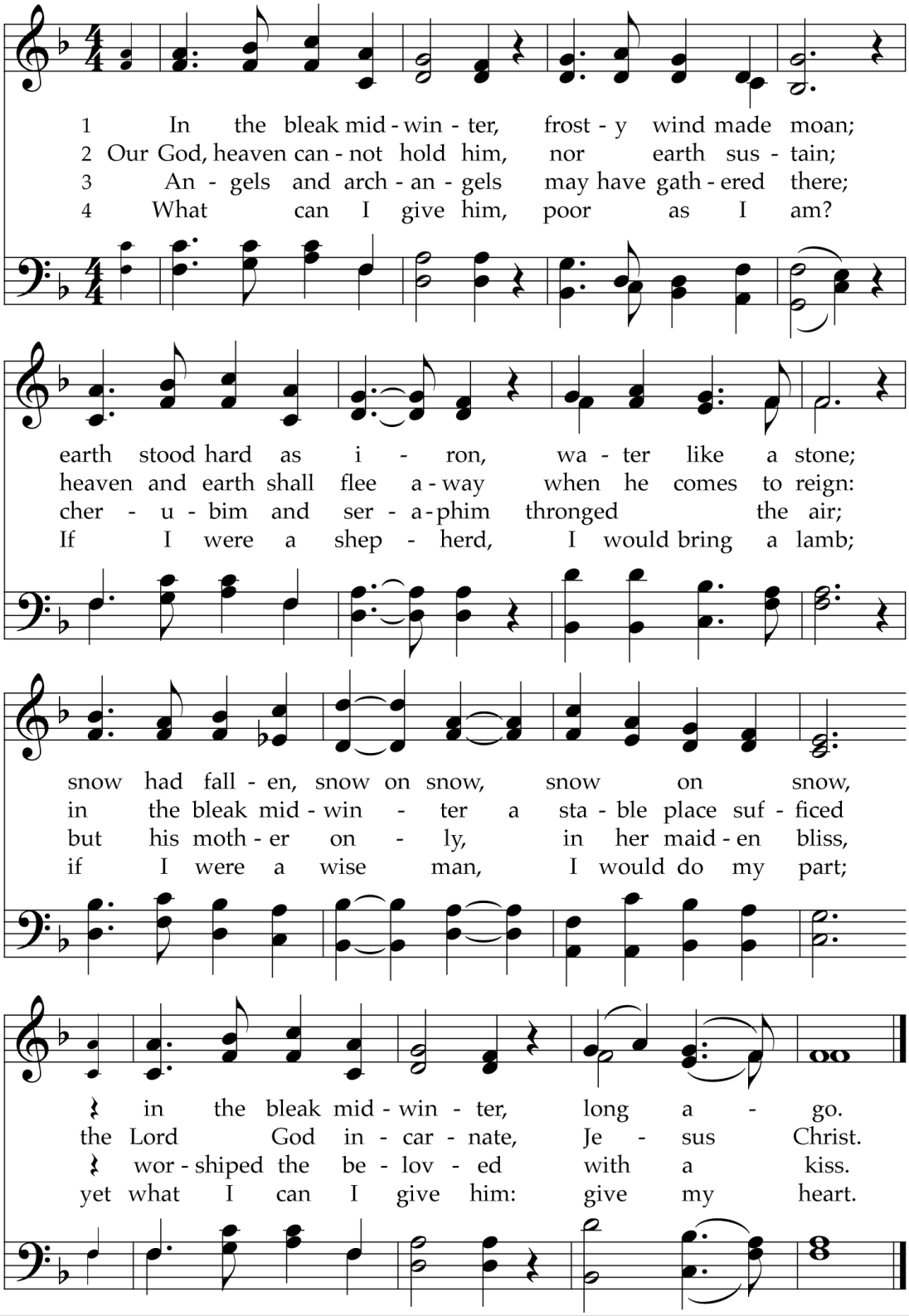
Reading: *An Excerpt from Winter Hours*

In the winter I am writing about, there was much darkness.
Darkness of nature, darkness of event, darkness of the spirit.
The sprawling darkness of not knowing.
We speak of the light of reason.
I would speak here of the darkness of the word, and the light of _____.
But I don't know what to call it.
Maybe hope.

Maybe faith, but not a shaped faith—only, say, a gesture or a continuum of gestures.
But probably it is closer to hope, that is more active and far messier than faith must be.
Faith, as I imagine it, is tensile and cool and has no need of words.
Hope, I know is a fighter and a screamer.

by Mary Oliver

***Hymn No. 144** In the Bleak Midwinter *Cranham*



Christ The Rev. Dr. Cheryl Bundy

Reading: John 1:1-5,10-13, 16

Leader: This candle is the Christ candle. Tonight as we light this candle, we acknowledge that Christ is the One for whom we wait, the One who is the Source of hope, peace, joy and love.

All: We seek you, Christ, and wait for your gifts.

Reading: *First Coming*

He did not wait till the world was ready,
till men and nations were at peace.
He came when the Heavens were unsteady,
and prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.
He came when the need was deep and great.
He dined with sinners in all their grime,
turned water into wine.

He did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy he came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours of anguished shame
He came, and his Light would not go out.

He came to a world which did not mesh,
to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh
the Maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane
to raise our songs with joyful voice,
for to share our grief, to touch our pain,
he came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

by Madeleine L'Engle

Prayers of the People The Rev. Martha Epstein

Leader: In the spirit of this season, let us confidently ask God for all the things we need; for ourselves as we participate in Christmas in whatever ways we can. We pray to the Lord.

All: God hear our prayer.

Leader: For our families and friends that they may continue to help and support us and that they may know love and peace and joy in you. We pray to the Lord.

All: God hear our prayer.

Leader: For those we have loved who have died. For all the losses that we know, that all may be redeemed by your promise that we cannot be separated from your love in Christ. We pray to the Lord.

All: God hear our prayer.

Leader: For the peace proclaimed by Christmas angels, to come throughout the world. We pray to the Lord.

All: **God hear our prayer.**

Leader: God of compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people, as we pray for ourselves and for our families and friends who live with struggles, illness or the pain of loss. Grant strength for today, courage for tomorrow and peace for the past. We make our prayers in the name of Christ, who shares our life in joy and sorrow, death and new birth, despair and promise.

All: **Amen.**

CANDLELIGHTING CEREMONY (Cont'd)

You are invited to take a candle from the table, light it and place it in the sand

- *in memory of loved ones*
- *in acknowledgment of those things that have robbed you of hope, peace, joy or love*
- *as a petition to God for help*
- *in solidarity with others*

Take the time you need. From the shadows that surround us, let us fill this Sanctuary with light.

Reflection Chaplain Daniel DeLoma

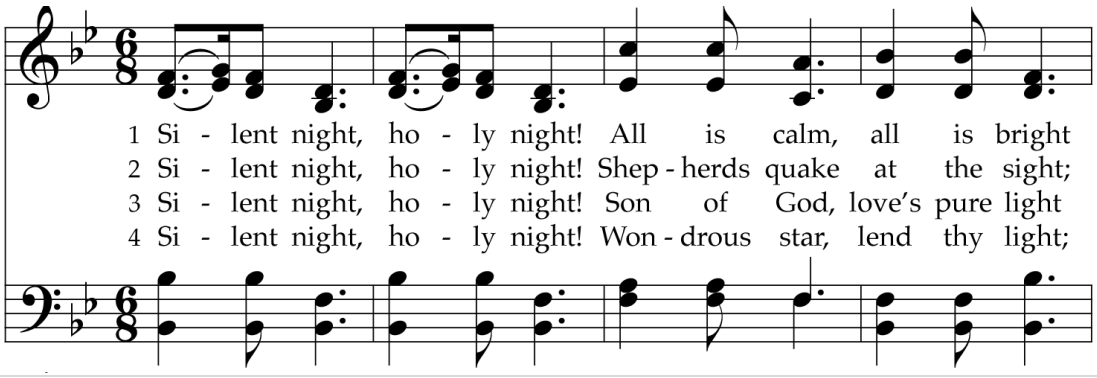
Advent Awakening

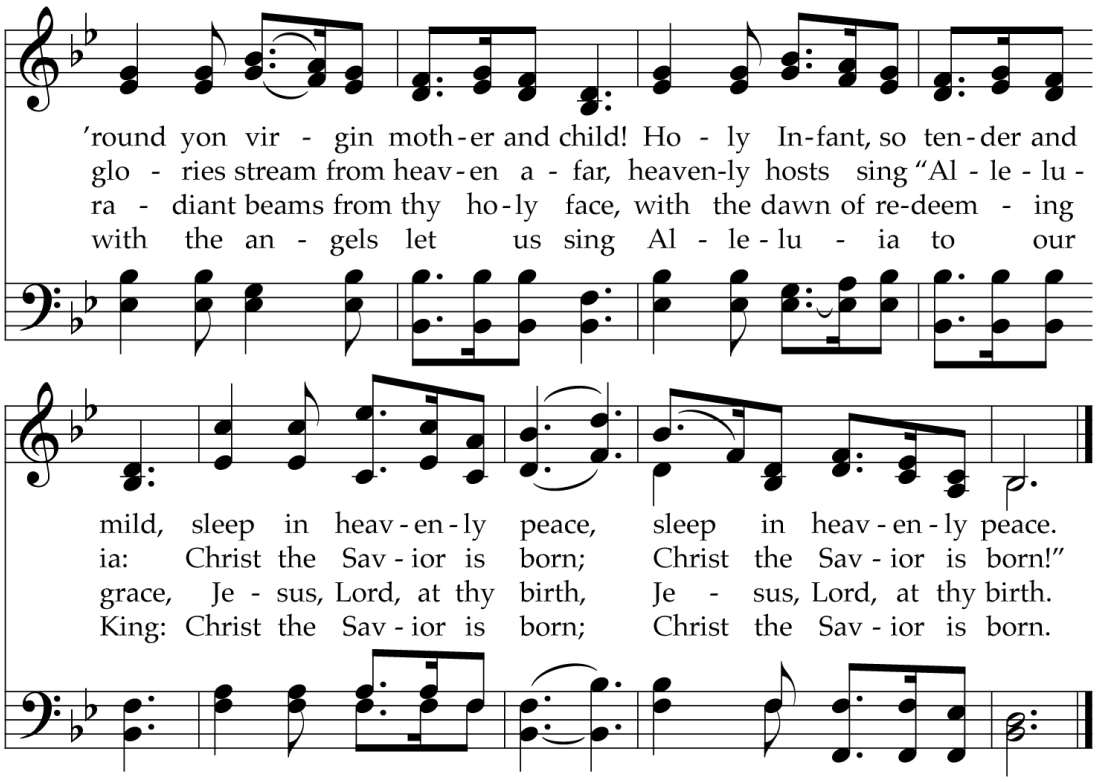
Just when you felt convinced
that the inevitable was already
happening, just when the dailyness
of every single thing had finally
persuaded you not to expect,
not even to look, just when tomorrow
had completely lost its meaning
as distinct from everyday,
a melody of dancing
was caught from far away,
one sigh became transmuted
in mid-air into a gasp of sheer
astonishment, and now a word, He comes,
new whispered on December's wind,
melts grim-set lips to simple
speech and song and framing
salutations.

by J. Barrie Shepherd

SENDING

***Hymn No. 122:** Silent Night, Holy Night! (verses 1, 3) *Stille Nacht*





***Benediction** The Rev. Mary Marple Thies

Leader:	God did not wait until the world was ready.
All:	**God came when prisoners cried out for release.**
Leader:	God did not wait for the perfect time.
All:	**God came when the need was deep and great.**
Leader:	God did not wait until hearts were pure.
All:	**God came to a world tarnished with sin and doubt.**
Leader:	God came and God still comes with love.
All:	**May we go into the world in God's love. Amen.**

***Ringing of the Church Bell**

***Postlude**

All are invited to stay as long as needed.

PARTICIPANTS LEADING WORSHIP

The Rev. Dr. Cheryl Bundy, Associate Minister, Talmadge Hill Community Church, Darien
Chaplain Daniel DeLoma, Visiting Nurse & Hospice of Fairfield County
The Rev. Martha Epstein, Pastor, United Methodist Church, New Canaan
The Rev. Dr. R. Scott Herr, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, New Canaan
The Rev. Mary Marple Thies, Parish Associate, First Presbyterian Church, New Canaan

Lisa Arkis, Flute
Jeanette Osborn, Soloist
Terence J. Flanagan, Director of Music and Fine Arts, First Presbyterian Church, New Canaan

Blessing for the Longest Night

All throughout these months
As the shadows have lengthened,
This blessing has been gathering itself,

Making

ready,

Preparing for

this night.

It has practiced walking in the dark,
Traveling with its eye closed,
Feeling its way by memory, by touch,
by the pull of the moon, Even as it

wanes.

So believe me when I tell you,
This blessing will reach you even if you
have not light enough to read it; It will

find you even though you cannot see it

coming.

You will know the moment of its arriving by your
release of the breath
you have held so long;
A loosening of the

clenching in your hands,

Of the clutch around your

heart;

A thinning of the darkness that had drawn itself
around you.
This blessing does not mean to

Take the night away, But it

Knows the hidden road,

Knows the resting spots along the path,
Knows what it means to travel in the company of a
friend.

So when this

blessing come,

Take its hand,

Get up.

Set out on the road you cannot see.

This is the night when you can trust

that any direction you go, You will be

walking towards the dawn.

by Jan Richardson

Help in Coping with Holiday Blues

The holidays can be a difficult time for many—especially for those who are grieving, feeling lonely, overwhelmed, anxious, or struggling with depression. You are not alone, and you do not have to carry this season by yourself.

If you are finding things especially hard right now, we encourage you to reach out for support. In addition to the clergy in attendance here, there are caring people available to listen, day and night:

- **Call or text 988** to reach the **Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.** Support is available **24/7**, and it is confidential and free. You do not need to be in immediate crisis to call—this line is for anyone who needs support. Or, text TALK to 741-741.
- **Silver Hill Hospital** offers an assessment program (by appointment) to connect those in need of treatment with a timely assessment and tailored referral for ongoing care. It is available to New Canaan residents for no out-of-pocket cost. Call the assessment intake line at 203-801-2390 and indicate that you are inquiring about the assessment program for New Canaan residents.
- **Call 911** or go to the nearest emergency room if you are in immediate danger.

This season reminds us that light is not the absence of darkness—but the presence of care, connection, and hope. All of the clergy and faith communities represented here tonight are here for you, shining that light.